Our contact with Gypsy/Travellers

The Gypsy/Traveller Project in Edinburgh and East/Midlothian employs a Development/Support Worker to provide support to Scottish Gypsy Travellers both on local authority sites and roadside camps. The Worker works very closely with the GT community and provides assistance in all matters relating to housing, benefits and any other requirements they have. Support is given on a one to one basis and the Development Worker has worked hard to gain the trust of these communities and has been accepted by them. The Worker acts as a conduit between the GT community who historically find it difficult and are unwilling to liaise with statutory agencies and the agencies themselves, and frequently advocates for them when dealing with places such as DWP or Local Authority.

Any policies or practice guidelines relating to Gypsy/Travellers that you have, including any aimed at other organisations/groups

Shelter has committed to work alongside other agencies who deal with the GT community for example, NHS, Education, Police, Local Authority Housing and Social Services. The Worker had developed a good working relationship with representatives from these agencies, and will endeavour to co-operate and commit to joint work for the benefit of the GT community. The Development Worker regularly attends and contributes to various liaison and strategy groups in relation to working with the GT community such as Lothian and Borders Police, Local Authority Strategy Group and Health Steering Group.

Any specific training or awareness-raising you undertake in relation to Gypsy/Travellers

In relation to the work the Development Worker has carried out in East and Midlothian, part of the remit was to provide awareness raising sessions for both council employees and other statutory or voluntary agencies within the area. Where possible these sessions were attended and facilitated by members of the Gypsy Traveller community from the local permanent site. These sessions were held on a monthly basis during 2011, with a very high attendance and success rate. It is planned that these sessions will continue on a less frequent basis later in 2012. As a result of the success of these sessions, Shelter were drafted in to provide awareness raising to East Ayrshire Council as part of the Equality Awareness event in March 2012. One session was provided with a view to securing another session at a later date. It is hoped that these sessions can be rolled out to other local authorities. This was not in the remit for the contact with Edinburgh Council.

What difficulties Gypsy/Travellers have accessing your services/support (or those provided on your behalf or in collaboration with you or by other bodies in your field) and what you have done to address any such difficulties.

The Development Worker is available three days per week, there is a dedicated phone number with answering service where messages can be left at any time. The Worker also has a mobile phone on which she is available during those times. Communication is an ongoing issue with the GT community for various reasons but the Development Worker has tried to make herself available to people as much as possible, this includes making a trip out to the site at least once a week,
sometimes more depending on requirement. If someone wants to see the Development Worker about anything she will endeavour to make sure that a visit is carried out within a minimum of three working days where possible. If someone needs to see another agency the Development Worker will make the contact on their behalf and if required accompany them to any appointments.

Mhairi Craig
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